



## Carol Atkinson

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**Carol Atkinson**

*Post-Doctoral Fellow, Mershon Center*



### **"Constructivist Implications of Material Power: Military Engagement and the Political Identity of States, 1972-2000"**

**Tuesday, October 4, 2005  
12:00 p.m.  
Mershon Center  
Room 120**



Carol Atkinson's latest research looks at the role of military exchange programs and military-to-military interaction and how they influence a state's democratic systems and processes. Her work draws, in part, on her own experience as an officer in the U.S. Air Force.

She considers military organizations as unitary actors that are agents of the state and play a coercive role, but she cautioned that we can't lump "military" into one single group. Rather, the military comprises diverse levels of staff, who have different ideologies, and military organizations are social structures with varying levels of interaction.

Because of the diversity in the military, Atkinson finds it valuable to evaluate it with a special focus on the roles individuals play in shaping the military organizations.

One example that figures prominently in her work is the role of programs that bring together military leaders from different countries. These training programs, in which Atkinson herself has participated, allow for personal contacts between military officers that ultimately build an international network of colleagues and promote the sharing of (often democratic) ideas.

She looked at statistical data to evaluate the extent to which military-to-military programs impact trends toward democracy in other nations. She believes that these exchanges contribute to better understanding between different security communities and help by converging shared interests.

It is a three-step process, said Atkinson. Individuals who participate in such programs acquire new ideas through their relationships with other military leaders. These ideas are transferred to a person's primary institution, which influences the group—and the individual's—political identity, which can then impact a state's ideational structure and its relations with other states. A state's socialization is impacted by normative persuasion that proliferates via participation in military-to-military professional education programs.

The U.S. military program, in particular, is designed to promote strategic and purposeful socialization. It does not, for example, put two leaders from the same organization or state in the same group, in order to promote the greatest level of diverse interaction. There is a prescribed and rigorous study in integrated classrooms. Non-U.S. military leaders then return to their home countries and take up non-trivial roles in their own organizations, taking with them a better understanding of how a civilian-controlled military functions in a democratic state.

Atkinson concluded that her preliminary research indicates that U.S. military education is positively associated with liberalizing trends.

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**Carol Atkinson** (Ph.D., Duke University, 2003) is a post-doctoral fellow in political science at the Mershon Center. Her research focuses on the political socialization of states. She is currently working on a study that assesses the long term

influence of U.S. military engagement activities on democratization. Before joining Mershon, she served as the director of the research elective program at the Air Force's Command and Staff College where she also taught courses on national security, military strategy, and airpower doctrine and history. Before assignment to the staff college, she was assistant professor of military studies at the Air Force Academy teaching senior level courses in military organization, operations, and strategy. Carol is a veteran of Operation Desert Storm (1991) where she served on the intelligence staff in Riyadh, and, subsequently, on the contingency planning staff in Dhahran/Khobar, Saudi Arabia. She retired from the U.S. military in 2005.